DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 642 JC 960 396

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TITLE	Transfer Advisement at One Community College: Integrating Technology, Initiatives and Programs for Increased Student Learning.
INSTITUTION	Carroll Community Coll., Westminster, MD. Office of Student Affairs.
PUB DATE	Jun 96
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Articulation (Education); College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; *Counseling Services; Counselor Role; Educational Change; *Guidance Centers; Guidance Objectives; *Guidance Programs; *Institutional Mission; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Carroll Community College MD

ABSTRACT

In spring 1996, Maryland's Carroll Community College (CCC) began efforts to shift institutional focus and mission from that of a teaching institution to a learning-centered institution. The college's Counseling and Advising Services unit, responsible for advising and transfer, has adapted this educational shift to its unique position in the college. The unit runs the Center for Career and Transfer Services, providing services to help prepare students for the transition to continued education or to the workplace. The Center, in turn, houses six terminals which have access to ARTSYS, a computerized data information system which allows users to ascertain the transferability of community college courses. CCC has also initiated a comprehensive information campaign that introduces students to the realities of the transfer process; one component of the campaign, the "Student Transfer Handbook," is distributed to new students and features information on transfer program decision-making, resources, local colleges and universities, and transfer policies. CCC also features two "Transfer Advisement Days" each year, in which representatives from regional private and public baccalaureate colleges distribute literature and discuss specific transfer requirements. Finally, CCC provides academic adviser training to faculty and staff, and the Counseling and Advising staff have developed a comprehensive manual covering academic policies. Contains 15 references. (MAB)

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TRANSFER ADVISEMENT AT ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY, INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS FOR INCREASED STUDENT LEARNING

OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
Counseling and Career Development Services
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JUNE 1996

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent article published in the *Community College Journal*, Palomar College president George Boggs called upon the leaders of community colleges to change the way in which they define the mission of their institutions. Specifically, he advocated the adoption of a new paradigm which:

> "... defines the colleges as learning rather than teaching institutions. The mission should be student learning, and we should measure our effectiveness based upon student learning outcomes. The most important people in our colleges are the learners. Everyone else in the institution is there to facilitate and support student learning. Faculty members, librarians, counselors, administrators, trustees, custodians, and secretaries, for example, are all important in achieving this mission." (Boggs, 1995)

To what extent does this shift in focus impact student affairs professionals, particularly, those who are involved in the academic advising process? Does the new paradigm necessitate changes in the way advisers administer their responsibilities? Can advances in technology coupled with existing program initiatives support this new paradigm, particularly with regard to the community colleges' role in preparing students for transfer?

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN TRANSFER

The role of community colleges in the transfer articulation process has long been recognized, both by the institutions and by those professionals directly involved in articulation. More recently, however, the topic has taken on new significance as traditional baccalaureate degree institutions, both public and private, struggle with a decreasing student applicant pool, reduced allocations for education, and public demand for greater accountability.

In her 1994 article on "Transfer Articulation," Helen F. Giles-Gee cites the changes of the late 1980s - significant decreases at four year colleges in first-time, first-year enrollment; the impact of financial shortfalls in many states triggering a reduction of appropriations; the subsequent rise in tuition - as factors driving legislators to question all institutions of higher education, two and four year, to improve their transfer efficiency. (Giles-Gee, 1994)

As Tarter and Miller have identified, other recent literature on the transfer articulation process identifies economics and rising tuition costs as important factors in not only generating enrollments for community colleges (Bauer and Bauer, 1994), but for fueling a change in perception of the community colleges by senior institutions (Brawer, 1992). Tarter and Miller's *Admissions/Advising Linkage Model* suggests a structure to facilitate articulation through the coordination of admissions and advising functions across institutions. Its authors address what they perceive to be the primary barriers to a student's successful completion of a baccalaureate degree, including the quality of advising provided at the community college level. (Tarter and Miller, 1995)

CARROLL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the spring of 1996, the president of one Maryland community college, Dr. Joseph F. Shields of Carroll Community College, announced his intention to further the teaching/learning process in order to establish the school as an outstanding "learning institution." His vision extended beyond a change in terminology to include the adoption of a new organizational structure reflective of the "learning paradigm." As a result of this shift in focus, the institution reviewed and revised its mission statement and goals to more accurately reflect its new commitment to learning. Concurrently, Shields encouraged all constituents of the college to examine their processes and to evaluate their efforts in light of a learning focus.

Carroll Community College is the newest of Maryland's 18 community colleges, having been awarded degree-granting authority by the State of Maryland on July 1, 1993. Although its establishment as an independent institution has been a relatively recent development, the College itself first opened in 1976, as a campus of Catonsville Community College (MD). Carroll Community College is located among the rolling hills of Carroll County, Maryland, approximately 25 miles west of the city of Baltimore. The County remains heavily invested in agriculture as its premiere industry. (*Carroll 2000*, 1996)

In its current mission statement, the College has identified among its primary functions

> "... to be a center of learning, offering excellent instruction and support services to students who wish to pursue higher education, to develop career competencies and opportunities, and to enrich their lives."

Specifically, among its institutional goals is

> "To prepare students who transfer to four year colleges or universities with the necessary knowledge and skills to continue towards a baccalaureate degree." (*Carroll Community College Catalog*, 1995)

The college is committed to offering accessible educational opportunities to the community. In support of that commitment, the college (like most community colleges) maintains an open door policy of admission. Carroll offers credit and non-credit courses in transfer, career and technical programs. Having identified transfer among its primary objectives, the college offers patterns of study in 24 areas (ranging from American Studies to Sociology) which will prepare students for transfer to a baccalaureate degree-granting college or university. These patterns may be taken within one of the following Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree curricula: Arts & Sciences, General Studies, Business Administration, or Teacher Education.

STUDENT POPULATION

In a "Credit Student Profile: Fall 1995" developed by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, a total of 2,501 students were enrolled in credit courses. Of this number, 859 were enrolled full-time, 1,642 part-time. For the past three years, full-time student enrollment has averaged in the 29-34% range. The same report indicates that approximately 48% of all students are traditional age college students (age 21 and under); the average age for all students during the Fall 1995 semester was 26.7 years.

More significantly, enrollment characteristics compiled by the college's Institutional Research office revealed that between the Fall 1993 semester and the Fall 1995 semester, the percentage of students enrolled in transfer preparation programs or the General Studies curriculum (the most common avenue for transfer students) ranged from 82% to 74% of the total student population. (*Credit Student Profile*, 1995)

The ramifications for the Counseling and Advising Services unit of Student Affairs (the division responsible for advising and transfer at Carroll) in providing high quality transfer information and procedures becomes evident. Further support of the importance to students was evidenced in a 1994 follow-up study of Carroll graduates. In that survey, students indicated the two most important reasons for attending Carroll were to prepare to transfer to a four-year institution (51%, n=100) and to earn an associate degree (22%). (Thompson, 1995)

ADVISING AND TRANSFER SERVICES

Academic and transfer advisement at Carroll Community College operate under a centralized

model from the Office of Student Affairs under the direction of the Director of Counseling and Career Development. The unit subscribes to the *Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising* established by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 1995) and the *Academic Advising Standards and Guidelines* developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (CAS Standards, 1994)

A self-study report prepared in October, 1995, in conjunction with the college's full accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, described Academic/Educational Counseling:

> "All professional staff members in the Division of Student Affairs participate in academic advisement, which is available to students on a walk-in or appointment basis. In order to increase visibility, the Director of Counseling and Career Development is available to students one day a month in the Great Hall for transfer advising. Also, there is a Director of Student Support Services who offers support services, academic advisement, and necessary accommodations to students with special needs. She also acts in an advocacy role for students with disabilities with various offices and faculty members.
>
> Faculty members participate in academic advisement during registration periods and assist students in educational planning on an ongoing basis throughout each semester. The Director of Counseling and Career Development offers academic advisement training to interested faculty every year." (Pappalardo and Weber, 1995)

Advising is available daily, Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., providing 42 hours of access per week (exclusive of advising appointments). Walk-in advising is staffed primarily by one full-time academic adviser, with supplemental coverage provided by three members of the counseling staff (who also provide advising services by appointment). During key registration periods, additional advising is provided by all Student Affairs staff, part-time advisers, and volunteer faculty.

TRANSFER AND ADVISING INITIATIVES

Given the intentions of the majority of students (to apply credits towards a baccalaureate degree program at an upper division college or university), the college provides a variety of resources to assist students in the academic planning and decision making process.

Center for Career and Transfer Services

Among the most significant initiatives has been the continued growth and development of a comprehensive library of resources - the Center for Career and Transfer Services. The utilization of the term "transfer" in the Center's title, the allocation of space and resources to the process, and the broad range of accessible hours for the Center underscore the institution's commitment to transfer issues. The Center for Career and Transfer Services is staffed by one full-time professional and student employees; Center hours run from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Friday.

> "The fundamental purpose of the Center for Career and Transfer Services is to prepare students for transition to continued education or to the workplace." (*Career & Transfer Services* brochure, 1995)

The Center houses key information to assist students in the transition process, particularly with regard to the selection of transfer institutions. Standard print resources including the *College Blue Book Series*, *Peterson's Guides*, and Career Guidance Foundation's micro fiche catalog collection (all public and private higher education institutions in the U.S.) are available. Hard copy catalogs for

colleges and universities in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Delaware are also available for in-house use.

Several computerized databases (namely *Discover* and *Visions*) can be accessed by students via six terminals located in the Center to select and search transfer institutions by geographic location, major, cost and other criteria.

ARTSYS

While the resources of the Center play an essential role for advisers and students in the broader transfer decision-making process, no single program has had a more immediate impact for Maryland community college students over the past ten years than the implementation of a computerized data information system, ARTSYS (copyright Sunrise Software Arts). Designed in 1988 through the cooperative efforts of eleven University of Maryland institutions, the 17 Maryland community colleges (in 1988) and 3 northern Virginia community colleges, the ARTSYS system exemplifies how technological advances and collaborative partnerships can serve the needs of students while providing cost savings to all constituents.

> "ARTSYS is a computerized data information system which allows students and advisers at a community college to ascertain the transferability of each community college course. It indicates whether the course is transferable and, if so, indicates the four-year institution's equivalent course number...
>
> It is a PC-based system, developed and maintained by the University of Maryland System... The system is presently in use at each Maryland community college, at all 11 UMS institutions, Morgan State University, and at certain independent colleges and universities.
>
> In addition to providing information on course transferability, the program provides, in community college course numbers, the recommended course for transfer to specific programs of study at the participating four-year institutions.
>
> The ARTSYS program permits the student to enter his or her transcript into ARTSYS to determine the transferability of courses he or she plans to take. ARTSYS also allows the analysis of the courses taken against a recommended transfer program." (Maryland Higher Education Commission, 1995)

ARTSYS is currently available at Carroll on the six terminals located in the Center for Career and Transfer Services; in addition, the program is loaded on individual office terminals for academic advising staff. During open registration periods, ARTSYS terminals are located in close proximity to the registration site to allow students and advisers immediate access to the system. The University of Maryland System, which maintains the ARTSYS database, distributes updated software to participating schools every six months.

Carroll Community College Student Transfer Handbook

In a college-wide attempt to improve student credit transfer, the college initiated a comprehensive information campaign that introduces students to the realities of transfer and the role of the community college in the process. Students who indicate that they may seek a bachelor's degree are initiated from their first inquiry, first visit, or first orientation meeting.

A new component of this campaign, the *Student Transfer Handbook*, was developed in 1995 and is distributed to new students; it is available to returning students in the Center for Career and Transfer Services. Prepared by the Counseling and Career Development staff and updated annually, the *Handbook* outlines in a concise format: essential factors in transfer decision-making; tools and

resources available (including ARTSYS); an overview of 31 regional colleges and universities, including the names and telephone numbers for the transfer coordinators, tuition, majors; frequently asked questions and answers about transfer; and the Maryland Higher Education Commission's Student Transfer Policies.

Central to this educational focus are three key points:

* First, with careful planning, where possible, every credit counts twice; once at the community college level (toward the Associate's degree) and once at the receiving institution through transfer (toward the Bachelor's degree).

* Second, credits equal time and money. Indecision or a change of heart in majors may have repercussions in the form of curriculum requirements at one or both institutions. The Bachelor's degree granting institution sets the curriculum. The curriculum indicates which 120 credits, in most cases, will comprise the Bachelor's degree from the institution.

* Third, at the time of transfer, when the receiving institution determines how the community college credits match the Bachelor's degree, the same articulation agreements (or ARTSYS) that the community colleges recommend to students are used to decide how the students' credits transfer.

Widely distributed in its first year, the *Student Transfer Handbook* reinforces other information efforts (orientation information sessions, newspaper articles, etc.) but has the advantage of being available at a time when a student may be ready to receive the information.

Transfer Advisement Day

In addition to maintaining and distributing the ARTSYS database to participating schools, the University of Maryland System coordinates Transfer Advisement Days (twice each year) at all Maryland community colleges. Sponsored at Carroll by the Office of Student Affairs and the Center for Career and Transfer Services, Transfer Advisement Day brings together representatives from regional baccalaureate institutions (public and private) to distribute literature and to discuss specific transfer admission requirements, scholarship opportunities, programs of study, housing, etc. at their respective schools. Conducted in the arena-type atmosphere of the college's Great Hall, Transfer Advisement Day attracts 30-35 colleges and universities and approximately 300 student participants. It provides students with an opportunity to quickly get first-hand information from a wide variety of institutions prior to an on-site visit or admissions appointment.

Adviser Training/Advising Handbook

As previously cited, the Director of Counseling and Career Development conducts academic adviser training to interested faculty and part-time advising staff on a semi-annual basis. In conjunction with this training, the Counseling and Advising staff developed an extensive Academic Advising Handbook, a comprehensive manual covering academic policies and procedures, advising notes for each career program of study and transfer preparation pattern (including faculty division contact, career information and regional transfer information for each program or pattern). Camera-ready handouts for advisers to photocopy and distribute to advisees cover student responsibilities and academic planning.

Most significantly, worksheets for each program of study (by catalog year) are included. Worksheets are freely available (either via adviser or at stand-alone racks in several campus locations) for students to self-monitor their progress towards an academic goal.

Essential to all training efforts is the provision of consistent and timely academic information to advisers, who, in turn, will be providing the information to students.

ADVISING, TRANSFER, AND THE LEARNING PARADIGM

Existing initiatives, programs and processes provide strong evidence of the college's pledge to prepare students for articulation to baccalaureate degree schools. Similarly, the advising process at Carroll mirrors the values established by NACADA, specifically:

> "Advisers encourage self-reliance by helping students make informed and responsible decisions; set realistic goals; and develop thinking, learning and life-management skills to meet present and future needs... Advisers work to modify barriers to student progress; to identify burdensome, ineffective, and inefficient policies and procedures; and to effect change." (NACADA Core Values, 1995)

Most importantly:

> "Advisers encourage students to be responsible for their own success and progress." (NACADA, 1995)

A key goal of transfer and academic advisement at Carroll has been the clear communication of student obligation - that is, the responsibility for the transfer process rests with the individual student, with the institution providing the necessary support, information systems, and tools for he or she to take that responsibility. This does not diminish the college's accountability or obligation, of course the contrary. However, it does necessitate the development of ways to more accurately assess the degree to which students understand their roles, academically and as members of the greater community. Community colleges have a higher proportion of students who are first in their families to attend college; they may not understand institutional expectations being thrust upon them.

At the same time, these students may lack the support of an experienced mentor and need basic information about how to proceed. While information and resources are essential, support and encouragement for students to explore goals and abilities can provide a foundation upon which they can make academic and transfer decisions. (Tarter and Miller, 1995)

Terry O'Banion's model for learning colleges suggests several considerations that have ramifications for all institutional units, including advising. His model suggests:

> "...the learning college will initiate a series of services to prepare the learner for the experiences and opportunities to come... The services include assessing the learner's abilities, achievements, values, needs, goals, expectations, resources, and environmental or situational limitations. A personal profile will be constructed by the learner in consultation with an expert assessor to illustrate what this learner knows, wants to know, and needs to know. A personal learning plan will be constructed from this personal profile, and the learner will negotiate a contract that outlines responsibilities of both the learner and the learning college." (O'Banion, 1995)

Although the responsibility for the delivery of such services extends across all segments of the college, it is apparent that the assessment process, the identification of goals, and the construction of personal profiles, are roles in which student affairs professionals already have a high degree of expertise. Academic advising staff, especially those at the community college level, have had to encourage students to be forward thinking in their academic planning, since a continuation of learning beyond the institution is anticipated for the majority of students. The same can be said for encouraging students to develop defined goals.

Another principle of O'Banion's learning college model is that "the learner engages the learning college." (O'Banion, 1995) A similar viewpoint is put forth by Boggs relative to learning institutions, that is, students need to be more actively engaged in learning as opposed to being only receivers of information. (Boggs, 1995) Whereas the idea of engagement can be applied to be instruction, it can be extended to services, as well. Although the instructional side has traditionally emphasized the mastery of both content and process (i.e. the development of a research paper), often, student affairs professionals, in their quest to provide efficient "customer service," have neglected to actively engage students in their own academic planning. The learning paradigm challenges staff to develop new methodologies to involve learners.

Technology, already in place in the form of ARTSYS and other computerized databases can serve as an important tool to further engage students. Internet resources, World-Wide-Web sites, interactive information kiosks, on-line degree audit systems, etc. rather than de-personalizing the academic planning/transfer process, instead can provide students with highly personal, highly specific information on demand - something even the most accessible academic advising center cannot do. At the same time, the new technologies provide alternative ways for students to communicate with staff (i.e. adviser websites, bulletin boards, etc.) other than the traditional advising appointment, a critical factor for a non-residential campus with a large returning, adult, part-time population.

Even more critical, before institutions rush into new delivery systems, is the clear identification of student learning outcomes by advising staff. What is it we want for our students and what do they want for themselves? Student development theory can provide student affairs staff with some preliminary direction, but we must, as Boggs has suggested, move beyond the barriers of traditional models, with involvement from "institutional stakeholders." (Boggs, 1995)

Does the adoption of the learning paradigm necessitate changes in the way advisers administer their responsibilities? Certainly, new models require us to re-examine our delivery of services. However, periodic assessment has always been an integral part of our operations, whether we have changed our institutional structures or not. As in the past, we will discard those procedures and strategies that have outlived their usefulness and test new methods. At the same time, we must guard against discounting our previous efforts in student development. Student affairs professionals have been at the forefront of a "holistic" approach to students; the learning paradigm provides us with the opportunity to enhance our efforts and broaden our message.

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